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AUTHOR Retallick, John A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to an emerging rational reconstruction of the concept of educational leadership in a critical theory (or method) of education. This partly accomplished task is extended by appropriating and analyzing the social philosophy of Jurgen Habermas. In particular, the theory of communicative action and the notion of the ideal speech situation is explored for relevance to the reconstruction of educational leadership. The prevailing bureaucratic and individualistic concept of leadership is increasingly inappropriate in educational organizations if democracy is to be advanced. Functionalist leadership research assumes that leaders and followers operate within an uncontested and real social structure. The leader's key task, then, is to increase productivity capability within a given structure. Contingency leadership theories, Blake and Mouton's (1975) managerial grid, and House's (1971) pathological theory of leadership are flawed because the assumptions of orthodox social science are inadequate. Actually, language forms and communication structures in an organization shape the leadership form deemed appropriate. Habermas posits two basic forms of social action: labor or purposive rational action (concerned with technical efficiency) and interaction or communicative action. In the ideal speech situation, all participants have an equal chance to employ any or all language functions. In "pure" communicative action, individuals participate in or take up discourse without hidden intentions or motives and have equal opportunities to question the validity of another's argument. This kind of communication structure should result in greater understanding, less distortion of meaning, and increased learning. (27 references) (MLH)

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
IN A
CRITICAL THEORY OF EDUCATION

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John A. Retallick
School of Education
Charles Sturt University - Riverina
Wagga Wagga , Australia

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Educational Leadership in a Critical Theory of Education

John A. Retallick

School of Education
Charles Sturt University - Riverina
Wagga Wagga, Australia

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to an emerging rational reconstruction of the concept of educational leadership in a critical theory (or method) of education. The task at hand has already been partly accomplished (eg. Foster, 1986; Smyth, 1989) and in this paper it will be extended by some further appropriation and analysis of the social philosophy of Jurgen Habermas which provides the grounds for the rational reconstruction. In particular the theory of communicative action and the notion of the ideal speech situation will be explored for relevance to the reconstruction of educational leadership.

Young (1989) has recently shown how Habermas' critical theory connects with education in the modern world. The core of the connection is in the creation and extension of democratic structures of communication where free and open discourse is the basis of learning and decision-making. Within those structures "the goals of education are rational emancipation, and mature articulateness" (Young, 1989:81). If young people are to be provided with opportunities to develop the necessary critical capacities at their appropriate developmental level to reach those goals there is an urgent need to rethink the forms of leadership and organisation that characterize our schools, colleges and universities. A critical and democratic theory of pedagogy implies a reconstruction of educational leadership in the same spirit. There are however, formidable difficulties. As Young (1989:42) points out :

> "democracy can only move beyond its present half-developed state if the level of institutionally permitted learning in society is allowed to be raised, technical questions distinguished from ethical-political ones and discursive rather than instructional or indoctrinatory learning processes allowed to take place."

The method of rational reconstruction derives from the tradition of critical theory established by the Frankfurt School in West Germany and more particularly by the best-known contemporary successor to that School, Jurgen Habermas. Following Habermas (1979), Held (1980) and Young (1989) it is possible to identify two essential (though somewhat abbreviated for the purposes of this paper) steps in the process of rational reconstruction. First it is necessary to develop an ideolgy critique of the problematic "object domain" ie. an historically situated immanent critique of existing forms of educational leadership aimed at revealing the gaps and contradictions from within. The second stage moves beyond the merely negative to the essentially risky task of projecting an alternative form of educational leadership for the practical realization of the theoretical possibilities. Such possibilities are derived and constructed from the theory of communicative action and the ideal speech situation.

Traditional Leadership Theory

Central to the argument to be presented here is that the dominant mode of theory, research and practice which goes under the rubric of educational leadership may be located within structural-functional social theory and its related discourse of technocratic rationality. Lest it be thought that this is a purely 'theoretical' matter it should be pointed out that a recent manifestation of this one-sided approach is to be found in the 'Schools Renewal' document (Scott, 1989) on the administration of education in New South Wales, Australia. Despite rhetoric about decentralization and school

empowerment, it is evident that the ideology of the "new managerialism" (including key constructs such as "efficiency and effectiveness", "accountability", "educational audit" and "performance appraisal") is the driving force in the document.

The notion of leadership in educational organizations has been conceptualized and studied in numerous ways over many years. For the most part such studies have drawn extensively on the literature of management in formal organizations outside of education. Whilst definitions abound, one which reflects much of the thinking behind the traditional approach to leadership is provided by Smircich and Morgan (1982: 258):

> "Leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeed in attempting to frame and define the reality of others".

This definition draws attention to the concept of an individual or group having the power to act on the world of others and define for them what is in their best interests. This view of leadership assumes a concept of "power over" other people whereas it can be argued that this focus is either misconceived or too narrow (Lukes, 1986: 3). Since it is through hierarchical structures of communication that most power over others is achieved it is evident that the practice of educational leadership has, by and large, been based on "top-down" structures. Contrary to most existing practice my argument is that this bureaucratic and individualistic concept of leadership is increasingly inappropriate in educational organizations if democracy is to be advanced, and is therefore in need of reconstruction. What is intended here is a critique of the structural - functional and technocratic underpinnings of the dominant mode of leadership theory and practice along with a proposal for an alternative theory of leadership which is centred on the concept of a symmetrical structure of communication.

Most of the theory and research on leadership in western countries has been constructed within the functionalist paradigm and employing a discourse of technocratic rationality. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979) functionalism includes at least the following:

a. society is 'real' and guided by a consistent, core value structure;

b. knowledge is objective and amenable to 'discovery' by positivistic methodology; and

c. researchers stand above and beyond the data they observe.

Leadership studies conducted within this framework assume that "leaders and followers operate within an uncontested and real social structure" (Foster, 1986: 8). Since the structure of the organization is assumed to be 'real' or 'natural' it is taken-for-granted and regarded as immutable. The key task for the leader then, is not to change the structure but to increase the productive capability within a given structure. Researchers using this paradigm seek to increasingly refine their instruments in the belief that they will yield more accurate data and eventually produce a true picture of leadership. Evidence of this approach can be found in Fiedler's (1967) "contingency" theory of leadership, Blake and Mouton's (1975) "managerial grid" and House's (1971) "path-goal" theory of leadership amongst many others.

However, as Foster (1986) points out these studies are flawed because the assumptions of orthodox social science are inadequate. Organizations are not natural but human constructions and organisation theory is not a unified body of knowledge and values but "a diverse set of ideas rendered by conflict" (Foster, 1986: 9). Indeed the discontinuity in organisational theory has such definite implications for the study of leadership that Foster (Ibid) states:

> "The paradigm governing the understanding of leadership, then, must allow the endeavour to be conceptualized differently; it must allow for historical and

> hermeneutic approaches; it must abandon the search for quantified rigour; it must lose the reductionist and uncritical mentality of orthodox social science."

The second point to be made about the traditional studies of leadership is that they have usually been conducted in a framework which assumes that hierarchy is natural. Educational leadership is predominately carried out through hierarchical communication structures. Power is distributed asymmetrically in fixed positions (not elected) such that teachers are at the lower end of the hierarchy or power structure. As Hummel (1982: 80) puts it:

> "Hierarchy means the clear delegation of authority descending through a series of less and less powerful offices, the clear status knowledge of where you are located in a hierarchy, and the principle of supervision by the office next highest up."

Whilst this organisational form emphasises hierarchical control and facilitates bureaucratic accountability, it is problematic as to whether it is an appropriate structure for the improvement of teaching and the professional development of teachers to further the cause of democracy. Accepting that "teachers' knowledge and professional competence are an upper limit to what can be presented effectively in the classroom" (Hughes, 1987: 7) it follows that the improvement of teaching involves, inter alia, teachers learning new knowledge and competencies. When learning and self-understanding are involved, dialogic rather than bureaucratic structure is more likely to achieve the desired outcomes.

Leadership and Technocratic Rationality

Giroux (1981) has pointed out how different approaches to educational theory and practice are underpinned by different guiding interests or ideologies. Recognizing the ideologies enables connections to be made between education and the wider economic, political and historical forces which provide the conditions for its existence.

Technocratic rationality is underpinned by the guiding interests of control, prediction and certainty which have been the major constitutive interests of educational theory, practice and research since the beginning of the twentieth century (Ibid). Such interests gave rise to an instrumental-managerial model of schooling which has been documented by Callahan (1962). The instrumental-managerial model refers to a form of reasoning based on a means-ends dichotomy where the primary focus is on the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of means for the achievement of largely unexamined ends of education. When attention is fixated on the level of means of education in the form of techniques, strategies, indicators etc., the broader intellectual questions of the purpose, values and ethics of education tend to be ignored.

Whilst the origins of the instrumental-managerial approach are to be found in the scientific management of Taylorism in the early part of this century it is important to recognize that the underlying ideology is still present. Indeed, as Giroux (1981: 10) points out "though the language used by mainstream educators has changed in the last few decades, the technocratic rationality that informs their work has not; it has been simply recycled and repackaged". An example of this recycling and repackaging can be seen in the recent moves to develop "performance indicators" for education in Australian schools.

Deriving from the social indicators movement in the USA during the 1950's and 60's (Wyatt, et.al.: 1989) educational indicators are seen to be means for assessing the "health" of the education system. This movement in education is following the path of positivist-oriented economics which has developed a range of indicators to describe the state of the economy. Proponents of educational indicators argue that with more work and refinement we will be in a position to control and adjust the education system much

in the way that certain economists attempt to manipulate the variables in the economy. Despite the enthusiasm of some, one writer has stated the position in this way:

> "Unfortunately, the literature does not abound with examples of the successful application of social or educational indicators" (Jaeger, 1987: 301).

It should be noted that there is currently a move from within the NSW Department of School Education, in the context of implementing the Scott proposals, to encourage schools in the direction of developing educational indicators to evaluate their work. Known as the School Development and Evaluation Process (S.D.E.P.) it was trialled in nine schools throughout NSW during 1989 and had the explicit agenda of introducing the discourse of educational indicators to schools. It is interesting to note the opening paragraph of an "information kit" on indicators in education prepared for the S.D.E.P. (Wyatt, Dean and Watt, nd: 2):

> "The terms 'performance indicators', 'efficiency', 'accountability', 'assessing achievement', 'basic skills testing' and 'outcomes' are once again fashionable terms in educational discourse and arguments among policy makers, politicians and economists".

I would want to ask, what about teachers? It is clear from this that the technocratic discourse is not being initiated by teachers and indeed may not even be in interests of teachers, much less the children they teach. The interests being served are those of the bureaucrats rather than the educators. Indeed, as Grundy (1987: 97) points out :

> "When teachers work in ways which promote the importance of reflection and judgment-making, their actions seem to have a quality of prudence or wisdom which is different from the qualities of effectiveness and efficiency associated with the technical interest".

The technocratic discourse of the "new managerialism" pervades the Scott Report which "is quickly being installed as the 'common sense' approach to revitalising schools in NSW" (Coombe and Battersby, 1990: 4). In one sense this is hardly surprising since the person selected by the NSW government to direct the "management review" is a management consultant and businessman. It is clear that the organizational principles of commercial enterprises have been used in the review. The language of "efficiency and effectiveness", "accountability", "educational audit" and "performance appraisal" provides the cement which holds the document together. Despite the statement that "the Review found there is a clear need to change dramatically the NSW system of educational administration" (p. 1) there is little evidence of "dramatic" change - hierarchical and bureaucratic structures are still in place. Indeed, it is stated that "existing structures would be strengthened, reflecting a clear line of accountability from Central Executive to each principal" (p. 17). The partial dismantling of Head Office (to be renamed Central Executive) simply transfers the bureaucracy to each region rather than being centrally located. The rhetoric of decentralization and school empowerment is largely a myth propagated to assuage the concerns of teachers and the public who may be looking for more fundamental changes. It is claimed that the proposed reorganization will better facilitate teacher development and improve the quality of education. Again, I would argue that this is largely mythical. Rather, a new form of control is being constructed to keep teachers in their place.

Two fundamental problems with the dominant approach to leadership have been raised. Firstly, the notion of hierarchical control is at odds with the professional development of teachers for a democratic society. At the heart of this issue is the asymmetrical nature of communication in hierarchical structures and the communicative distortions which are likely to arise. Secondly the ideology of technocratic rationality produces a form of management which is exclusively concerned with the means of education while the ends are taken for granted and left unexamined and unquestioned. Questions of ideology and

morality, particularly in relation to the equity issues of gender, ethnicity and social class are ignored in this form of management.

Leadership and Systematically Distorted Communication

The essence of the argument so far is that the language forms and communication structures in an organization shape the form of leadership which is deemed appropriate. Hierarchical structures and a technocratic discourse are complementary to and consistent with a "top-down" form of leadership. However, it has been shown that this poses a contradiction in that such forms of organization and leadership are not in the interests of teachers as educators and moral agents in a democratic society.

The work of Jurgen Habermas (1973; 1979; 1984) is helpful at this point. Habermas contends that in every communication situation in which a consensus is established under coercion, there is likely to be an instance of systematically distorted communication. The hierarchical structure of leadership relations, where the leader is able to bring the authority of his or her position to bear on subordinates, is a case in point. This situation produces the "paradox of authority" (McGuire, 1977) which refers to the question of establishing the criteria for determining when authority is legitimate or rational. For instance, on the one hand, authority is vested in a school principal by the Department of School Education on behalf of the state which has the right to rule. One the other hand, autonomy of decision-making is the prerogative of the teacher who is morally responsible for his or her actions.

The only way out of this dilemma, according to Habermas, is through a "rationally motivated consensus" - one achieved solely through the force of the better argument rather than the power of position in a hierarchy. The guiding idea is that a consensus is rational only if brought about through the cogency of the arguments employed and not through structural constraints on the discourse.

This absence of structural constraint can be characterised, Habermas argues, in the structure of communication. "His thesis is that the structure is free from constraint only when for all participants there is a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts, where there is an effective equality of opportunity for the assumption of dialogue roles" (McCarthy, 1978: 306). The notion of symmetrical communication then, is seen to be an antidote to the problem of hierarchical structure in professional relationships. If communication is symmetrical, teachers can be confident that the quality of their arguments will be the decisive factor in reaching agreements, making plans, developing curricula and so on. Further, and most importantly, I would argue that teachers will be more likely to learn and thereby improve and develop, if they are involved in communication situations which are symmetrical rather than coercive. The implications of this position are quite significant bearing in mind what Bernstein (1985: 12) says in relation to Habermas' work: "If dialogue is not to be an empty, impotent ideal, then a transformation and reconstruction of the social institutions and practices in which dialogic communication is embedded becomes a practical imperative."

The Theory of Communicative Action

Habermas' writings in the area of communication are undoubtedly his most significant recent work. Those writings began with a concern for communicative competence, moved to the development of a program of "universal pragmatics" (Habermas, 1979) and, more recently, shifted to the sociological theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). The purpose of Habermas' project is to provide a foundation for the critique of ideology, insofar as ideology can be conceptualized as communication which is systematically distorted by the exercise of power or coercion. Thus, in every communication situation where a consensus is arrived at under coercion or under systematically distorted conditions of communication, there is an instance of illusory

discourse. This, according to Habermas, is the contemporary form of the critique of ideology.

The genesis of Habermas' theory may be found in his assertion that there are two basic forms of social action - labour or purposive-rational action and interaction or communicative action. The distinction between these two spheres of life may be seen at a fundamental level. Progress in the sphere of labour is characterized by expansion of productive processes and increased efficiency through technological developments in the post-modern world. The form of logic appropriate to this sphere is instrumental or purposive-rational action where efficiency is the major criterion for judging success or improvement. On the other hand, progress in the communicative or interactive sphere of human life is characterized by the extension of communication free from domination and is governed by normative consensus as opposed to technical efficiency.

An important point to be made here is that Habermas is not opposed to technical efficiency per se, but what he is pointing to is the extension of the logic of technical efficiency i.e. purposive-rational action, to more and more areas of our lives and the consequent abandonment of communicative action from those areas. Young (1989: 7-8) reiterates this point in these terms:

> "The development of medicine, technology, industry, communications media and information processing have led to the emergence of institutional complexes; these in turn both require and constitute new managerial systems which penetrate more widely into more and more aspects of daily life, destroying the primal communal and institutional sources of motivation and, hence, hope".

The result of this incursion into the "life-world" is that we are becoming better at asking and answering the 'how to' questions and losing the ability to ask the 'why' questions. For instance, to take a topical example from the field of medical technology; in the area of invitro-fertilization we have a highly sophisticated technology to carry out the procedures i.e. the 'how to', but much less attention is given to methods of reaching societal consensus on the moral and ethical issues surrounding the use of that technology. In the field of teacher education, we spend an inordinate amount of time on the technical aspects of teaching and very little on challenging student teachers to confront and explore the ideological basis of what they are engaged in. When I look at the Scott Report I see a further example of technically-oriented reasoning overtaking the field of educational leadership; reshaping and redefining it as instrumental action. According to Scott the new "educational manager" in NSW schools is to be concerned almost exclusively with such things as global budgeting, performance indicators and improved efficiency. Whilst those processes may be necessary in an age of economic rationalism the point I want to make is that very little attention has been given by Scott to the other side of the leadership equation i.e. processes for consensus formation through communication and consultation. To be fair, of course there is one section entitled "Parent and Community Support" which purports to deal with this issue. However, it is less than one page in a document of some forty pages. This seems to confirm the Habermasian thesis that we are becoming preoccupied with the technical and instrumental questions and neglecting the communicative sphere of life.

The Ideal Speech Situation

The concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations. The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their action by way of agreement. Language is given a prominent place in this model and it takes all the functions of language equally into consideration. That is to say representative, regulative and expressive functions of language are given equal prominence.

The very act of participating in discourse involves the supposition that genuine consensus is possible and that it can be distinguished from false consensus. If we did not suppose this, then the very meaning of discourse would be called into question. In attempting to come to a rational decision about truth claims, we must suppose that the outcome of our discussion will be (or at least can be) the result simply of the force of the better argument and not of accidental or systematic constraints on communication. The absence of constraint - both external (such as force or threat of force) and internal (such as neurotic or ideological distortions) can, Habermas argues, be characterized formally in terms of the pragmatic structure of communication. The position is that the communication structure is free from constraint only when all participants have a "symmetrical distribution of chances" to participate in all the various ways. What this means in terms of language functions is that all participants have an equal chance to employ any or all of the functions of language. This is termed by Habermas, the "ideal speech situation".

White (1988) is instructive on Habermas' use of the ideal speech situation. He suggests that Habermas proposes two rules defining "pure communicative action". The first requires that actors do not take up a discourse with hidden intentions or motives, or in a way in which the true attitudes, feelings or needs of some would be unlikely to be expressed. "It requires both a reciprocal openness of actors about their true intentions and motives and an equal chance to express their attitudes, feelings and needs"(p.56).

The second rule defining pure communicative action ensures that anyone can call into question the validity of another's argument. That is to say there should be an equal distribution of opportunities "to order and resist orders, to permit and forbid, to make and extract promises, and to be responsible for one's conduct and demand that others are as well"(p.57).

However, even though we might grant that the notion of the ideal speech situation is constitutive of the meaning of discourse we know that it is usually counterfactual - the conditions of actual speech are not often those of the ideal speech situation. Indeed the space-time limitations, the psychological and other limitations of actual discourse seem to preclude the frequent realization of those conditions. Despite this there is still an important place for the notion of the ideal speech situation as McCarthy (1978: 309) points out:

> "Nonetheless this does not of itself render the ideal illegitimate, an ideal that can be more or less adequately approximated in reality, that can serve as a guide for institutionalization of discourse and as a critical standard against which every actually achieved consensus can be measured".

Also instructive on the use of the ideal speech situation is the sensitive discussion of the concept by Young (1989: 75-78). Whilst concurring with the usage of the ideal speech situation as a "methodological standard for critique, including critical reconstruction of segments of the life-world" he points out that Habermas has moved to correct earlier impressions that it could be used as a crude kind of *measure* of the degree of oppression in all actual communication situations. He asserts that, for Habermas, "the ISS was a tool to think with, not a measure".

Since many concrete situations exist where a degree of asymmetry is rational and appropriate, it should not be used as an all-sufficient basis for critique. Rather the identification of asymmetry requires a "rational historical reconstruction" of the institutional and other conditions that brought about the particular state of affairs. Only then can questions of justice be addressed.

It is in the sense of a "critical standard" for a rational reconstruction that the ideal speech situation can be employed in terms of educational leadership. Symmetrical communication, as a practical embodiment of the ideal speech situation, can provide a

guide for the critique of domination and for the reconstruction of language in leadership. It is argued that a communication structure wherin all participants have an equal chance to perform the whole range of speech acts and dialogue roles will result in greater understanding, less distortion of meaning and increased learning. A view of leadership reconstructed from the theory of communicative action will be one which establishes and maintains a structure to facilitate symmetrical communication and the building of consensus.

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that the dominant mode of educational leadership theory and practice is in need of critique and reconstruction. Based as it is on functionalist propositions and located in a discourse of technocratic rationality it fails to meet the needs of teachers for professional development and improvement in a democratic society. The theory of communicative action has been put forward as a framework for continuing the task of redefining and reconstructing the notion of leadership to meet the major aims that it has claimed for itself.

Note: An earlier version of this paper under the title of "Leadership, Power and the Structure of Communication" was presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Council for Educational Administration, Armidale, September 1989.

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